

I am most pleased to have this opportunity to speak to you tonight. I would like to thank you, as my host, for your invitation to visit Israel and for the kind hospitality you have extended to me and my delegation since my arrival. Here in Israel, I am reminded of the great role of the Jewish people throughout history in bringing to all mankind so many significant contributions in numerous and diverse areas of human endeavour. Indeed, in Canada also, I am struck by the contribution which Canadians of the Jewish faith have made in the intellectual, artistic, professional and business life of our country.

As you have pointed out, Mr. Minister, despite differences in the history, the make-up and the geo-political situation of our two countries, we have in common the social experience of young nations, built to a large extent by immigrants. We also share a heritage of common values which has provided the basis for close co-operation between Israel and Canada within international organizations.

The consolidation and further expansion of bilateral relations with Israel as well as with all countries in the Middle East is an important element of Canadian diplomacy in this region. In itself, this goal would have been a sufficient motive to accept the kind invitation extended to me by your government; but in addition, I welcome this opportunity to establish personal contacts with you, and with other Israeli leaders. I was particularly looking forward to in depth discussions of Israeli positions and perceptions on the political situation in this region of the world; and the meetings we have had so far have amply confirmed the usefulness of such exchanges. I hope to resume these discussions with you, Mr. Minister, before long -- this time in Canada; for it is with great pleasure that I invite you to pay an official visit to our country. As I noted earlier in another capital, Canadian policy on the Middle East is not fixed in stone; it reflects the existing political circumstances in time and is, therefore, liable to change as these circumstances evolve. That is why I wish to consult more frequently, in the future, with leaders like yourself.

Given that we share a common outlook in many respects, I am correct, I believe, in characterizing relations between Canada and Israel as excellent. As you have pointed out, many thousands of Canadians travel to Israel each year and these visits are reciprocated by the broad range of Israelis who travel in turn to Canada. On the economic front we have witnessed last year yet another increase in our two-way trade.

During the course of my trip to the Middle East, I have visited several of Israel's Arab neighbours. Consequently,